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ABSTRACT

A study examined the ways that the use of portfolio assessment in graduate literacy learning classes altered the teaching and assessment practices of these teachers in their own classrooms and the ways portfolio assessment in such classes provide evidence of growth in learning/thinking. Subjects, 75 graduate students in 4 classes, were asked to keep literacy portfolios which included representative samples of themselves as language users, language learners, and language teachers. Multiple measures, including in-class and follow-up portfolio questionnaires, outside reviews, and anecdotal evidence collected by instructors, were used to provide data for the study. Results indicated that: (1) portfolio assessment was an effective way to document growth, provide a record of change and show the learner's application of issues and ideas encountered in class; (2) most of the teachers continued to seek out other opportunities to explore the use of portfolios; (3) by the end of the semester, almost all teachers stated that they had plans to initiate or expand the use of portfolios in their classrooms; and (4) 85% of the teachers indicated that constructing their own portfolios was helpful in the process of self-assessment. Findings suggest that successful implementation of portfolio assessment in schools will depend upon providing time and encouragement to teachers as they work with and refine the process in their own classrooms. (RS)

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Portfolio Assessment in Teacher Education: A Tale of Two Cities
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Students enrolled in Spring and Summer 1990 graduate classes in literacy learning at our two universities (4 classes, 75 students) were asked to keep literacy portfolios which included representative samples of themselves as language users, language learners and language teachers. In order to encourage individuality, guidelines for what should be included were relatively unstructured, with the requirement that portfolios provide information to outside evaluators, demonstrate personal responsibility for and reflection on their own work, and include a written explanation of what was in their portfolios and why. Students discussed their initial plans regarding content and organization of their portfolios with their peers during in-class response groups and with the instructors through informal letters. As instructors, we provided formative response to students following a midterm review of their portfolios. Upon completion of the course, students were asked to grade themselves, using evidence in their portfolios to support their decisions.

Two questions guided our study: 1) In what ways will the use of portfolio assessment in graduate literacy learning classes alter the teaching and assessment practices of these teachers in their own classrooms? and 2) In what ways will portfolio assessment in graduate classes in literacy learning provide evidence of growth in learning/thinking? Multiple measures, including in-class portfolio questionnaires, follow-up portfolio questionnaires, outside reviews, and anecdotal evidence collected by instructors, were used to provide data for our

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Results: Question 1. Assuming that knowledge influences teaching and assessment practices, we first examined teachers' entry-level knowledge. The in-class portfolio questionnaire indicated that 81% had minimal or no knowledge about portfolio assessment prior to their enrollment in these classes. Fifteen percent indicated they had some knowledge and only 4% had a more complete understanding. Second, as we looked at what teachers learned about the process by constructing their own portfolios, five significant insights emerged. Portfolio assessment: 1) is an effective way to document growth, provide a record of change and show the learner's application of issues and ideas encountered in class; 2) allows for assessment to become more personalized by incorporating choice, ownership and self-responsibility; 3) requires reflective thinking, encouraging self-discovery and evaluation of personal and professional behaviors; 4) has advantages over traditional testing models, especially in terms of authenticity, accuracy and long-term perspective; and 5) assists the learner in being more on-task, focused, organized and accountable. Finally, we explored whether teachers continued to learn about portfolios. In the follow-up surveys (N=37), 53% of the teachers indicated that they had continued to seek out other opportunities to explore the use of portfolios. These opportunities included further reading, discussion, course work, and classroom application.

Did knowledge influence practice? First we looked at their entry-level use of portfolios. According to the first questionnaire, 31% (19/62) of the teachers who were in classrooms were not using portfolios. The remaining teachers were using only some aspects of portfolios such as work sample folders, writing folders, journals and reader response logs. Their descriptions revealed minimal student involvement in the process and indicated the primary purpose was to collect papers to share at conference times. By the end of the semester, almost all teachers stated that they had plans to initiate or expand the use of portfolios in their classrooms. Their responses included plans about content (specific items to be included);

process (pace, frequency of entries, management); and use (for assessment, especially student self-assessment, rather than to collect papers). Responses from follow-up portfolio questionnaires, however, indicated that only 50% (17/34) had implemented portfolio assessment in their teaching contexts. Descriptions of how they were using portfolios suggested changes in practice by revealing greater student involvement --76% of the teachers (13/17) have involved students in the process of document selection.

Results : Question 2. Did the use of portfolios in graduate classes provide evidence of growth/thinking? According to the teachers, 85% indicated that constructing their own portfolios was helpful in the process of self-assessment; the five insights identified above further support this statement.

In reviewing teachers' portfolios, however, we noticed that evidence of growth and thinking was somewhat dependent upon the way they utilized the portfolio process. For example, some teachers remained at an *awareness level*, primarily using the opportunity to become aware of portfolios but not using the process to direct their own growth and document that growth for others. Other learners viewed the portfolio as a scrapbook. At this *collection level*, teachers used the portfolio as a repository for materials dealing with issues and ideas but gave very little evidence that they had reflected on these issues and ideas. Some teachers reached the *discovery level*, at which they used their portfolios to explore who they were. While this reflected thinking, learners at this level seldom used their thinking to direct their own growth. It was our perception that teachers at these three levels were not able to use portfolios effectively to provide evidence of growth and thinking. Our feelings were corroborated by two outside reviewers who examined photocopies of sample portfolios from our courses. When teachers were able to go beyond discovery and begin to set goals, develop plans for making progress toward those goals and document their progress, the portfolio process exceeded our expectations for providing evidence of growth and thinking. At this time we see

such learners at an *actualization level*, because they have conceptualized the portfolio process and used it to direct their own growth and change.

Comments and concerns. We see the tremendous potential for portfolio assessment as a self-evaluation component in any classroom context. For us, portfolios have helped students develop a knowledge base related to portfolio assessment; provided a hands-on technique for encouraging learners to take responsibility for their own learning; enabled us to align our assessment practices with our teaching beliefs; and provided a model for classroom teachers interested in changing their own teaching and assessment practices. While we have some concerns about our own implementation of portfolios, the longer we work with the process, the more we are able to address those concerns. Based on our experiences with portfolio assessment, we would argue that successful implementation in the schools will depend upon providing time and encouragement to teachers as they work with and refine the process in their own classrooms.